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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 000879

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP
CENTCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/08

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SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA: BEDOUIN LORE ON CROWN PRINCE
ABDULLAH'S TRIBAL POWER BASE

REF: RIYADH 730

11. (U) CLASSIFIED BY DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION THEODORE KATTOUF.
REASON: 1.5 (B).

12. (C) SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO MEMBERS OF THE ANAYZA TRIBE, CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH'S PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF POWER LIES IN THE SHAMMAR AND ANAYZA TRIBES. HE HAS MARRIED INTO BOTH TRIBES, DRAWS ON THEM FOR THE MAJORITY OF HIS NATIONAL GUARDSMEN, AND HAS PREVIOUSLY RELIED ON THEM TO PRESERVE HIS COMMAND OF THE NATIONAL GUARD IN THE FACE OF AN INTRA-FAMILY EFFORT TO DEPRIVE HIM OF IT. WHETHER TRUE OR NOT, THESE COMMENTS REFLECT THE POPULAR LORE UNDERLYING MUCH OF ABDULLAH'S POLITICAL APPEAL TO THE SAUDI PUBLIC. END SUMMARY.

TALKING ABOUT ABDULLAH

13. (C) POLOFF SPENT A RECENT AFTERNOON AND EVENING WITH MEMBERS OF THE LEADING FAMILY OF THE SUBAIE, ONE OF THE FOUR PRINCIPAL SUBTRIBES OF THE ANAYZA--FIRST IN THE HOME OF A FAMILY MEMBER AND THEN IN THE FAMILY TENT. GATHERED IN THE TENT THAT EVENING WERE THREE OF THE TRIBAL SHEIKH'S BROTHERS, THREE OF HIS FIRST COUSINS (TWO OF WHOM ARE U.S.-EDUCATED), NUMEROUS MORE DISTANT COUSINS, VARIOUS TRIBAL RETAINERS, AND A VISITING SHEIKH OF ANOTHER TRIBE. THEY CHATTED, SIPPED TEA, AND PLAYED CARDS.

14. (C) IN ADDITION TO CONFIRMING THE WIDELY HELD BELIEF THAT CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH IS THE LEAST CORRUPT OR "CLEANEST" OF THE SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY, THE CONVERSATION REVEALED THE GREAT EXTENT TO WHICH THESE TRIBESMEN BELIEVE--NO DOUBT TO AN EXAGGERATED EXTENT--THAT ABDULLAH'S POWER BASE LIES IN HIS TRIBAL TIES.

ABDULLAH'S TWO MAIN TRIBES

15. (C) SPECIFICALLY, THE CONVERSATION BROUGHT OUT THE FOLLOWING BELIEFS. ABDULLAH'S TWO MAIN TRIBAL SUPPORTERS ARE THE SHAMMAR--HIS MOTHER'S TRIBE--AND THE ANAYZA. BOTH ARE LARGE, HISTORICALLY POWERFUL NORTHERN TRIBES. HE HAS TWICE MARRIED INTO EACH TRIBE, THEREBY CEMENTING HIS EXISTING TIES TO THE SHAMMAR (THROUGH HIS MOTHER, A SHAMMAR) OR FORGING NEW ONES TO THE ANAYZA. AS COMMANDER OF THE NATIONAL GUARD, ABDULLAH HAS DRAWN PRIMARILY ON THESE TWO TRIBES. OUR SOURCE ESTIMATES THAT SIXTY TO SIXTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THE ACTIVE NATIONAL GUARD ARE SHAMMAR AND ANAYZA TRIBESMEN.

SAVING HIS COMMAND OF THE NATIONAL GUARD

16. (C) ONE MAN TOLD THE FOLLOWING STORY TO ILLUSTRATE THE SUPPOSED SUPPORT ABDULLAH RECEIVES FROM THE SHAMMAR AND ANAYZA TRIBES. DURING THE TIME OF KING FAYSAL (D. 1975), CERTAIN FACTIONS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY WERE CONCERNED THAT ABDULLAH WAS GROWING TOO POWERFUL AND WANTED TO TAKE THE NATIONAL GUARD AWAY FROM HIM AND

PUT HIM IN CHARGE OF A LESS POWERFUL GOVERNMENT ENTITY. WHEN ABDULLAH WAS IN THE NORTH VISITING THE TRIBES, HE LET THEM KNOW THAT HE WAS UPSET BY THE PROSPECT OF LOSING COMMAND OF THE NATIONAL GUARD. ON THE ADVICE OF THE TRIBAL SHEIKHS, ABDULLAH PUT THE NATIONAL GUARD ON MANEUVERS AND REMAINED IN THE NORTH WITH THE TRIBES. IN NO TIME, KEY MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY STARTED ASKING WHY THE NATIONAL GUARD WAS ON MANEUVERS, WHERE ABDULLAH WAS, AND WHO HE WAS WITH. WHEN THEY LEARNED HE WAS IN THE NORTH WITH SHEIKHS OF THE SHAMMAR AND ANAYZA TRIBES, THEY UNDERSTOOD THE WILL OF THE TRIBES AND GOT WORD TO ABDULLAH THAT HE WOULD REMAIN IN COMMAND OF THE NATIONAL GUARD.

17. (C) COMMENT: ALTHOUGH SELF-GRATIFYING AND NO DOUBT EXAGGERATED--IF NOT ALTOGETHER APOCRYPHAL--THE STATISTICS AND STORY HIGHLIGHT THE EXTENT TO WHICH THESE TRIBESMEN BELIEVE THAT A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BINDS ABDULLAH AND THE TRIBES AND THAT HE IS THEIR MAN IN THE GOVERNMENT. REFTTEL DESCRIBES THE GENERAL IMPORTANCE OF TRIBAL SUPPORT TO THE AL SAUD. END COMMENT.

FOWLER